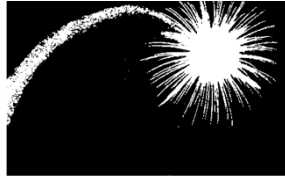


4/5/6 FLASH



for grades 4, 5 and 6

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Introduction

This is a curriculum designed by Public Health – Seattle & King County. It consists of nineteen lesson plans for the intermediate classroom (grades four through six). There are also FLASH curricula for use in mainstream and special education classes at the middle school and high school levels.

The goals of 4/5/6 FLASH are to assist in the development of persons:

- who are knowledgeable about human development and reproduction,
- who respect and appreciate themselves, their families and all persons,
- who will neither exploit others nor allow themselves to be exploited.

A word about philosophy . . .

No curriculum is neutral and objective. Education itself implies a certain philosophy (i.e., that knowledge is preferable to ignorance). Neutrality is not even the ideal. If education could be stripped of beliefs, the skeleton would not be worth much.

The schools DO, however, have an obligation to reflect community beliefs. And they must be honest about the particular premises of the curriculum. Where there is no general agreement on a particular issue in the community, the teacher's place is to point that out, to explain honestly the several conflicting viewpoints, and to encourage the student to discuss the issue at home.

The primary beliefs inherent in 4/5/6 FLASH are these:

1. A person's unique qualities are to be celebrated.
2. Everyone is entitled to talk and be taken seriously.
3. Everyone is entitled to "pass".
4. No one is entitled to treat another person simply as a means of selfish gratification; coercion and manipulation are wrong.
5. People have a responsibility to learn as much as possible about themselves and the people they care about. In order to meet this responsibility, they must have the opportunity to receive honest answers to honest questions.

How to use FLASH

Know Your State and Local Guidelines

It is important that you follow the guidelines established by your State Department of Education and local School Board, as well as any other relevant laws and policies.

Unless your district has already approved 4/5/6 FLASH contact your curriculum office at least a few weeks before you plan to begin a sexuality unit to find out its policies.

Plan Your Sexuality Unit

This curriculum supplement addresses ten topics in its nineteen lesson plans. It is not necessary to confine yourself to fifteen sessions, nor to address the topics in the exact order presented here. It is also by no means essential that you approach them on consecutive days.

Work on students' self-esteem and their skills in decision-making might begin the first week of school. Sexual exploitation might fall into a safety unit in October and November, along with first aid and fire prevention. In January, the class might discuss puberty, reproductive system and pregnancy, followed in February, March and April by other body systems. In May, the year might end with sex roles, families and friendship as well as other social/emotional health issues such as drug abuse.

You are welcome to use part or all of this material as you see fit. However, we recommend that fourth through sixth-grade students study all of these topics at some point.

Prepare Your Administrator

Discuss the course content, materials and activities with your building principal. They need to know of outside speakers you plan to invite. S/he should also see the letter you send parents and guardians, offering to excuse their children.

The importance of involving your administrator from the outset cannot be overemphasized. The Principal must be informed about your unit, in order to respond to parents' questions and concerns.

Prepare Parents

The primary sexuality educators of your students are their parents or guardians. Consciously or unconsciously, they have been providing sexuality education since birth. They may or may not be comfortable in their role as teachers. They may or may not be knowledgeable about the facts, but they certainly have beliefs and feelings that they share with their children.

Your role is two-fold. First you must inform them that you're about to begin the unit. Your job is to offer them the options of pre-reviewing materials and/or of excusing their son or daughter. Second, for those students who do partake of the unit you can use the unit to foster better communication at home. There are several ways to do this:

- Encourage your PTA to sponsor a free workshop for parents, to help them become better sexuality educators ... provided by your local health department.
- Encourage your PTA to sponsor a workshop on puberty and communication for parents and their students TOGETHER...offered by Planned Parenthood.
- Provide homework assignments that encourage communication; but follow these guidelines:
 - a. Explain that the student can do the assignment with any adult who is a family member or who is like family
 - b. Always offer an alternative assignment for students who may not be able to talk with an adult in the family.

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- c. Make sure assignments are clear, purposeful and related to the content of your in-class lessons.
- d. Never ask students to report on the content of these conversations--only that they DID talk. To ask about a student's or family's beliefs or practices as to sex would be a violation of their privacy. We suggest that you use the form in Appendix B to follow up, if you want to give credit for this type of homework.

Prepare Your Materials

This curriculum is mostly self-contained. Except for the Puberty and HIV & AIDS lessons, you do not have to order A.V. materials, schedule guest speakers or organize field trips to utilize it. And even for those lessons, we haven't found great films to recommend.

Simply select any lesson plans you would like to use. For each lesson you decide to use, just look at the second page to see which transparencies or worksheets you will need to photocopy and/or if there are any other materials to assemble.

Using Worksheets

Be creative. You can use them in any of a number of ways.

- as individual extra-challenge assignments
- for pairs of students to practice cooperative review
- in groups of up to six students, as a team-building exercise
- as a whole class, aloud, to stimulate visual/aural learning while you do a chalk-talk
- for family-type homework, to encourage parent/child communication in a game format where individuals or teams compete

Using Speakers

- Talk with them in advance to make sure they understand your expectations and you understand theirs.
- Prepare your students to have paper and pencil ready, be attentive and considerate, and enjoy the change of pace.
- **STAY IN THE CLASSROOM.** State law requires that a certificated person be present at all times. Besides, you cannot do an adequate job of integrating the lesson with the rest of your curriculum and/or following up on concerns that do not get addressed, unless you have heard what the speaker and the students have said.

Using Anonymous Question Boxes

Lesson 1 will give you specific directions for establishing an anonymous question system in your class.

We recommend, whenever possible, reading the questions on any particular topic the day before you plan to address that topic in class. That will give you time to think through age-appropriate, accurate, simple ways of answering them. The pages that follow this one will also offer strategies for answering them in respectful, useful ways.

Answering Students' Questions

The surest way to meet students where they are developmentally is to make time for them to ask questions and to honor them with answers.

In this section, we will discuss the place of values in the classroom and offer:

- A model for addressing value-laden questions, the FLASH Value Question Protocol
- Strategies for addressing other questions students ask, including:
 - questions containing slang
 - personal questions
 - questions about sexual technique

The Place of Values in the Classroom

It's neither possible nor desirable to provide value-free education. Every moment you spend in the classroom you are communicating some of what you believe about sexuality. When you talk about your students' families, when you talk about your family, when you intervene in sexual bullying, you communicate values.

FLASH is not value free. But those who work in public schools need to distinguish between two different *types* of values. They need to be handled differently.

There are some that are relatively universal. These are values shared by 95% of families we serve. They are values we aren't only *permitted* to express; they are ones we are obligated to reinforce.

There are others that are not universal. These need to be answered with care to avoid hurting or offending a child and their family.

Relatively universal values include such things as:

- Forcing someone to have sex with you is wrong.
- Knowingly spreading disease is wrong.
- Taking care of your reproductive health is important.
- Sex between children and adults is wrong.
- Elementary school-aged children should not have sex.

Values that are not universal – those without consensus in the United States – are ones where a teacher should NEVER teach or express a particular belief. But that doesn't mean we should avoid them altogether. The teacher's role is to provide information on these matters and to facilitate respectful discussion about them.

Examples of non-universal issues where there is a wide range of values in the community include:

- Abortion
- Birth control
- Masturbation
- Sex outside of marriage
- Cohabitation
- At what age & under what circumstances it's ok to start having sex

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Parents and guardians, unlike teachers, should feel free to ask their children about their feelings and beliefs and to share their own with their children. In fact, this sort of dialogue within families is very important. Children absolutely need a chance at home to explore feelings and beliefs with adults they love, just as they need a chance to learn factual information and to have universal, community values reinforced at school. Employees of public schools and other public agencies, unlike family members, have an ethical obligation not to share our personal beliefs in these non-universal arenas; and not to side with one family or one religious perspective.

Just because it is inappropriate in a public school setting to teach *particular* values on controversial issues, it does not mean one can't teach *about* the issues. It just means that it must be done with respect for the diversity of opinion within the community. For example, a teacher may discuss abortion—what it is, where abortions are performed, the fact that it is legal in the United States—but it is not appropriate for that teacher to share their beliefs about the rightness or wrongness of abortion.

When answering a question about an issue where there is diversity of opinion, utilize the Values Question Protocol that follows.

FLASH Values Question Protocol

1. Listen to the question or read it aloud verbatim.
2. Validate the question.
3. Identify it as a belief question.
4. Answer the factual part, if there is one.
5. Help the class describe the community's range of beliefs.
6. Refer to family, clergy and other trusted adults.

Example:

Q: *"What do you believe about masturbation?"*

A: *"That's an interesting question; a lot of kids wonder about masturbation. This is not a fact question like most of the ones you've been asking me. It's one where every culture and every family believes something different. I can tell you what masturbation is. It's when a person touches their genitals for pleasure. What kinds of beliefs have you heard about masturbation? Some people believe ... [pause] Uh, huh, and some people believe ... [pause, listen, nod] Some people believe ... [pause]. So the point is there are lots of different perspectives about masturbation. Only your family can tell you what they believe about it. It would be a good idea for you to talk with someone in your family, and ask them what their beliefs are."*

You will eventually tailor your use of the protocol, only using every step the first time that, for example, masturbation comes up. For now, you should practice the protocol step by step until it becomes a natural part of your teaching.

READ THE QUESTION

Read it verbatim, if you can. Use your judgment, of course, but even reading aloud relatively crude language—as long as you do it with a serious tone and facial expression —conveys your

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respect for the child who asked the question. It is likely to promote respect in return. Sometimes students need, for social status' sake or out of embarrassment, to ask in ways that seem intended to challenge us even though the underlying question is completely legitimate and they have a serious need for an answer. Even when they don't, someone else in the class may. And if not, your taking the question seriously will still set a vitally important tone.

VALIDATE THE QUESTION

"I am glad someone asked this one." Or "That's an interesting question." Or "People ask this every year." Or "This one is really compassionate/imaginative/respectful."

This will encourage your students to keep asking while also discouraging snide remarks about whoever asked that particular question.

IDENTIFY IT AS A BELIEF QUESTION

"Most of the questions you've been asking have been 'fact questions' where I could look up an answer that all the experts agree upon. This one is more of a 'value question' where every person, every family, every religion or culture has a different belief."

Teaching your students to distinguish facts from opinions (and from feelings) is at least as important as any content you will convey.

ANSWER THE FACTUAL PART, IF THERE IS ONE

"Before we get to differing beliefs about masturbation, let me just make sure you know it doesn't cause people to go blind or mentally ill or to grow hair on their palms or anything like that." Even if the question is about the rightness or wrongness of masturbation, you need to make sure that your class understands what it is and that - values notwithstanding - no physical harm results from masturbating.

Some questions that are apparently fact questions may need a discussion of the underlying values, but always start by answering them:

"Can girls masturbate?" "This is a common question. Masturbation is when someone touches their own genitals for pleasure. Both boys and girls are able to masturbate. People do have different ideas, though, about whether or not masturbation is OK..."

HELP THE CLASS DESCRIBE THE COMMUNITY'S RANGE OF BELIEFS

"Tell me some of the things you've heard that people believe about that."

"Some people believe ___?"

"Um, hmm, and some people believe ___?"

On sensitive issues such as sex and religion, it can be really unfair and potentially illegal to ask individual students their own beliefs. But it is very appropriate to ask them to think about what they have heard.

In a class that is used to thinking about the range of community values, you will be able to draw a full assortment of answers from the students. In other groups, especially younger ones, you may draw only a dichotomy ("*Some people believe masturbation is wrong.*" and "*Some people believe it is right.*") In any case, your role is two-fold:

1. to make sure that every belief gets expressed - or paraphrased - respectfully, hopefully just the way the person who believed it might express it, and
2. to make sure that a complete a range of beliefs gets expressed, even if you have to supplement the few values the group can think of:

"That's right, some people believe that masturbation is wrong under any circumstances and that people should never do it. And some believe masturbation is a good and healthy thing, as long as it's done in private. Some people believe it's OK for little kids to masturbate but that after a certain age, children should be taught not to. Others believe there's no age limit. Some people think masturbating is fine for people who are single but that once you are in a relationship it's better to stop. But then some couples give each other privacy so their partner can masturbate."

REFER TO FAMILY, CLERGY AND OTHER TRUSTED ADULTS

"Because people have such different beliefs about masturbation, I really want to encourage you to talk with someone in your family, or an adult who is like family to you about this topic. Only they can tell you what they believe."

Notice that this encouragement didn't assume that every child has a parent they can talk with. Some may be newly in a foster home and don't yet have that kind of relationship with their new "parents."

Other Types of Questions

Most questions your class asks will not be value laden. New teachers are often relieved to discover that *most* questions asked in a sexual health unit, like most in other units, are straightforward fact questions: ones for which you have an answer.

Some types of questions can be more challenging. Rather than a formal protocol, like the one we offered for value-laden questions, the following pages contain tips and strategies. Your professional judgment will determine which you use in response to a particular question.

QUESTIONS USING SLANG

Student questions often contain slang. Most often, students use slang because it is the terminology they are most familiar with, or because they have a question about the meaning of the term.

Slang terms range from widely used, common terms to words that some may find inappropriate or off-putting. When students use slang it is an opportunity to teach the class the medical or standard term. It is also an opportunity to maintain a respectful environment and diffuse the need to test or shock the teacher.

Strategies:

- Validate questions with slang, just as you would all other types of student questions.
- When reading a written question aloud, read the question verbatim. Identify the slang as such, in a non-judgmental way, and translate it into medical/standard language. Let the class know we'll all be using the medical/standard term in class.
- Assume good intent on the part of your students. Students typically use the language they have been exposed to, including by family members. Don't denigrate students for using slang; simply instruct the class to use the medical/standard term in health class.
- Handle slang as a learning opportunity, in your regular calm and respectful manner. This greatly reduces students need to test or shock you.
- Your answer might include the values question protocol.

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- Let your administrator know, in advance, how you handle slang in your classroom.
- Slurs fall into a different category than slang. If students use a slur in sexual health class (e.g. for women, people who are gay, etc.), use the following steps: (1) validate question by saying you're glad this important topic came up; (2) identify the term as an offensive word; (3) let the class know we won't be using this word in school, ever, because it is hurtful. It is helpful to proceed as though the speaker didn't mean harm because it will help them save face and more readily adopt more respectful language.

PERSONAL QUESTIONS

Students sometimes ask questions that contain a personal element. The question could be about you, such as, "How old were you the first time you had sex?" It could be about the student himself or herself, such as, "I have a rash that I am worried about, what should I do?" Or, it could be a personal question about someone else, such as, "Is Mr. Smith gay?"

Students ask these questions for a variety of reasons... They are curious about the trusted adults in their life. They are newly learning about boundaries. They are seeking to normalize their own experiences. They are applying the things they are learning in sexual health class to themselves and the people in their lives. And, they find you a credible and accurate source of information about things that are important to them.

There are many useful strategies for answering these questions in a helpful way, while also teaching about privacy and appropriate boundaries.

Strategies:

- Validate personal questions, just like other student questions. Be cautious about inadvertently embarrassing or shaming students for asking personal questions.
- Use personal questions as an opportunity to model and teach about healthy boundaries.
- Do not share information about your sexual experiences or history. Sometimes teachers want to share this information to set a positive example or to share a cautionary story. Even though the intent is good, it is still inappropriate to share with students. It is also less helpful to students than one might hope.
- When you decline to answer a question about yourself, follow these steps: (1) affirm that students are often curious about the adults in their life; (2) reframe the question, so that it is general, not personal; and (3) answer with factual information and/or the values question protocol.
- When students ask a written questions about themselves or someone else, paraphrase the question to the third person. Answer the question about people in general, not this specific person.
- When students ask questions out loud about themselves or someone else, remind the class about respecting people's privacy, and answer the question about people in general, not this specific person.

SEXUAL TECHNIQUE QUESTIONS

Technique questions are about how to perform a sexual act. They are often worded as “How do you...”, “How does a person...” or “What’s the best way to...”

Clearly, giving guidance about sexual performance is inappropriate. Yet there are helpful, age appropriate ways to respond to these questions. Most questions that appear to be about technique (to adults) are just a student’s way of getting more information about a topic. The intent of the question is usually “What is...”

Even during those times when a sexual technique question is being asked, there is usually a general factual question embedded in it that can be answered instead.

Strategies:

- Validate questions worded in this way, just as you would all other types of question.
- Reframe technique questions as factual questions. Answer the factual aspect of the question.
- If you think the question is really asking for information on how to perform sexual acts, let the class know that teachers, school nurses, etc. don’t give sex advice. Instead, use the student’s question as an opportunity to give accurate information about the topic in general.
- Your answer might include the values question protocol.

Gaining Skills and Confidence in Answering Student Questions

Many educators view answering student questions as the cornerstone of sexual health education. Not only is it fundamental to student learning; it can build trust in your classroom, provide modeling of respectful communication, and address the confusing and sometimes dangerous misinformation that bombards young people in our culture. Skill and confidence come with practice, but training and technical assistance is available. With training and technical assistance, most educators find that their anxiety lessens, their skills improve rapidly, and answering student questions becomes a more enriching experience for them and their students.

Contact FLASHTrain@etr.org for more information about scheduling a training.

Final Considerations

Sexual health education is an important part of young people’s school experience. In addition to giving them factual information they need about their bodies and feelings, it teaches important skills that students will use to keep themselves healthy well into their adulthood. Young women and men who become pregnant in high school are at high risk of dropping out of school. STDs acquired while an adolescent may stay with that person for the rest of their lives. Risk of sexual assault is at its highest during high school and college years. The information taught in FLASH has a real impact on the health, happiness and futures of young people.

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If you have any further questions that were not covered in this introduction, please contact the developers of this curriculum. You can also find additional information on the FLASH website, in the appendixes of the FLASH curriculum, and in the Rationale sections of the High School lessons.